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ABSTRACT

This document contains volume two of Learning Abstracts, a bimonthly newsletter from the League for Innovation in the Community College. Articles in these seven issues include: (1) "Get on the Fast Track to Learning: An Accelerated Associate Degree Option" (Gerardo E. de los Santos and Deborah J. Cruise); (2) "The Learning College: Both Learner and Learning Centered" (Terry O'Banion); (3) "Soaring Moles and Burrowing Eagles: Decision-Making in the Learning College" (Jerry Moskus); (4) "What the Learning Paradigm Means for Faculty" (George R. Boggs); (5) "Putting Learning First at Sinclair Community College" (Karen Wells); (6) "Launching LearningFirst at the Community College of Baltimore County" (Irving Pressley McPhail); and (7) "Promising Prospects: An Inner London Approach to 21st Century Skills" (Wendy Forrest). (EMH)

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LEARNING abstracts

GET ON THE FAST TRACK TO LEARNING: AN ACCELERATED ASSOCIATE DEGREE OPTION

Gerardo E. de los Santos & Deborah J. Cruise

We are in the midst of a Learning Revolution, challenged to reevaluate the way we historically have approached teaching and learning in higher education. As O'Banion and Milliron frame this movement to become more learning-centered institutions, we must strive "to remove the time-bound, place-bound, role-bound, and bureaucracy-bound models of education that shackle innovation and transformation." Breaking free of these "shackles" requires that we not only place learning at the forefront, but that we also explore new instructional delivery models and expand the number of learning options for our students.

As innovative leaders in higher education, community colleges are best poised to provide instructional delivery alternatives to meet ever-changing student needs. Many excellent examples illustrate the success of such efforts: (1) telecourses, (2) online courses, (3) summer courses, (4) flex-term courses, (5) intercession courses, i.e., courses between semesters, (6) evening courses, (7) weekend courses, and (8) miniterm courses. These alternative instructional delivery options are innovative approaches to meeting the needs of our communities while promoting academic excellence.

In 1995, a team of Richland College faculty, staff, and administrators analyzed enrollment and retention data from a number of accelerated format courses (miniterm, Mayterm, winterterm, weekend, and summer courses) spanning a three-year period at Richland College. These data suggested that courses offered over an accelerated time frame promote student success and better retention than traditional length courses. The team concluded that the intensified, accelerated delivery format is a successful option for many students and should be expanded, focused, and coordinated at Richland College. Based on these findings, the Fast Track Degree Program was developed and implemented in the fall of 1996.

Fast Track Degree Program Overview

Daytime and Evening Options

The Fast Track Degree Program is an option allowing students to earn an Associate of Arts and Sciences (A.A.S.) degree in general education or in business within a one-year time frame through intensive daytime courses. The courses required for the completion of the associate degree are offered in 12 daytime terms spanning a 12-month period. Students who enter with college-level skills and are able to take two classes during most of the 12 terms can complete all A.A.S. degree requirements in fewer than 12 months. Even students needing six hours of developmental classes can complete all degree requirements in one year.

For those students unable to pursue an A.A.S. degree during the Fast Track daytime option, an evening Fast Track option to earn an associate degree in 20 months is available. Students who choose the evening option enroll in one evening course per four-week term to complete a degree in 20 terms (less than two years).

Structure: Schedule of Terms

Four Fast Track terms, each four weeks long, are offered each fall and spring semester. In addition, winterterm, Mayterm, and two summer terms are offered to complete the Fast Track degree plan. Altogether, 12 accelerated terms are offered during the 12-month academic year. This design maximizes the number of entry points for students who require flexibility. In addition, since a new term starts every four weeks, fewer Fast Track students enroll in courses after the first class day than in traditional courses. This reduction in late registration increases opportunities for student success by offering more courses for which students will be enrolled on time.

During a Fast Track four-week term, classes meet four days per week (Monday through Thursday), leaving a three-day weekend for students to study, complete homework, and conduct research. These courses meet three hours per day in both the day and evening options. The daytime blocks include a morning block from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. and an afternoon block from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. The evening time block is from 6:45 to 9:45 p.m.

Flexible Options for Students

Fast Track courses are not designed to replace the traditional academic semester schedule, but to offer more flexible course options and entry points for students. While some students prefer the accelerated Fast Track courses, many students mix and match Fast Track classes with other alternative instructional delivery options, as well as with traditional long semester classes. Therefore, the design allows students with demanding work or school schedules to dedicate four-week segments toward earning a degree or to simply add Fast Track course offerings to their existing schedules to increase their learning opportunities.

An extremely important feature of this program is that the courses are scheduled sequentially and repeatedly. Therefore,

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students may enroll at almost any time during the year, never having to wait longer than four weeks for a course to start and always having several options of courses in which to enroll. If students need to "stop out" because of illness, a family emergency, or an extremely busy time at work, an entire four-month semester is not lost. Instead, students can reenroll and "start-up" again in as few as four weeks.

Fast Track Students and Faculty

Student Population

When the program was first implemented, the original development team anticipated that almost all of the students who would enroll in the Fast Track option would be returning adults displaced from their jobs in the middle of a traditional semester. While the program indeed attracts many returning adults, a much broader spectrum of students are choosing Fast Track classes, including a number of recent high school graduates who want to complete their general studies requirements quickly and expedite their transfer to a four-year college or university.

Clearly, the Fast Track option is not suited for all students' learning styles and preferences. Yet, for many students, Fast Track offers not only an attractive scheduling opportunity, but also a new and beneficial approach to learning. Fast Track students report that the program facilitates their learning in three major ways: (1) the immersion factor leads to more effective concentration on the given subject matter; (2) the concentrated, three-hour time blocks lead to better understanding than do traditional 55-minute classes that meet three times per week; and (3) naturally forming cohorts serve as collaborative student support mechanisms that carry over from Fast Track course to Fast Track course.

Fast Track Faculty

Just as students have different learning styles and preferences, faculty members vary in their teaching styles and preferences. Thus, some faculty prefer the traditional semester approach to teaching or have concerns about issues of content coverage in accelerated formats, while others find the Fast Track format of instructional delivery appealing, rejuvenating, and exciting. Faculty who opt to teach in the Fast Track format semester after semester say they prefer the accelerated instructional format for several reasons: (1) the Fast Track format forces instructors to be more organized, and therefore more effective; (2) Fast Track students tend to be more focused and goal oriented; (3) instructors get to know their students better via the three-hour class sessions; (4) procrastination is no longer an option; and (5) a strong sense of community is formed in the classroom, which some faculty refer to as their "Fast Track Family."

Although the number of full-time faculty who teach in the program is growing, adjunct faculty currently teach the majority of Fast Track courses. Faculty who teach in the Fast Track Program are forced to reevaluate their traditional instructional approaches and accommodate the challenges and opportunities inherent in this accelerated format. Faculty who are willing to embrace these changes tend to be educators who are characterized as enthusiastic, flexible, energetic, creative, dedicated, and fun.

Program Evaluation and Development: Learning As We Go

Research Design

To evaluate the Fast Track Program, an initial research design was developed to capture data such as enrollment growth, grade distribution, retention rates, withdrawal rates, and transfer and graduation rates, as well as student and faculty qualitative surveys of their Fast Track experiences. As we gather more data, we will conduct further analysis to identify differences in demographics among cohort groups and factors that impact student success.

Preliminary Research Findings

Because the Fast Track program is relatively new, we are using research findings to improve the program as well as to sharpen the program evaluation as we go. After collecting two years of preliminary quantitative and qualitative data, we are learning to ask better research questions to help us arrive at the answers we seek. Thus far, we have learned that the program has grown significantly from the first fall 1996 semester with a duplicated headcount of 447 to a duplicated headcount of 695 in the spring of 1998. In addition, when we compare the Fast Track course data to that of like courses taught in the traditional long semester, we find that: (1) retention is better in the Fast Track courses, and (2) performance as measured by grade distribution is comparable between the two groups.

Conclusion

Most community college students are busy people who juggle work, family, and community responsibilities in addition to college enrollment. Growing numbers of students are entering our "open doors" with expectations for more instructional delivery options and challenging us to offer sound learning opportunities that are ever more accessible. The Richland College Fast Track Program is one approach that meets these high demands by offering flexible course options and accelerated degree completion. Such programs are increasingly relevant to community colleges that are striving to provide more learning-centered options for students who seek educational alternatives to meet the demands of their busy lives.

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Special thanks go to the members of the Fast Track Development Team for designing and giving life to this new learning option for Richland College students.

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Learning abstracts

THE LEARNING COLLEGE: BOTH LEARNER AND LEARNING CENTERED

Terry O'Banion

As the Learning Revolution spreads rapidly throughout education, a new language on learning is beginning to appear. Every new book, conference program, and Web site is peppered with learning terms: learning college, learning communities, learning organizations, learning outcomes, brain-compatible learning, surface learning, deep learning, and learning facilitators.

The term "learning college" is beginning to be used to designate a new direction in education and provides an umbrella to shelter many of the concepts in current use. Two key concepts are "learner centered" and "learning centered." These terms are often used interchangeably, but they do not mean the same thing. While different, however, both concepts are deeply embedded in the history of education and are equally valuable in providing a foundation for the Learning College.

Learner Centered

Seasoned educators can easily remember the Humanistic Education Movement nourished by humanistic and phenomenological psychologists and one of the movement's key leaders, Carl Rogers, who gave us "client-centered therapy." Institutes in dozens of universities in the 1960s, with funds from the National Defense Education Act, trained school and college counselors in client-centered approaches to counseling, and "client centered" set the tone in many schools for the interactions between counselors and students and sometimes between teaching faculty and students.

The Student Development Movement, launched at the beginning of the 1970s, urged colleges and universities to become more "student centered." Student development champions, in their many statements, would not settle for counselors and student personnel professionals alone to become student centered; they wanted everyone in the institution to do so, and they achieved modest success in their goals.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, the purveyors of Total Quality Management asked educators to become more "customer centered," another variation on the theme. For the most part, educators have rejected the terminology of customer centered because it smacks too much of the business world and implies that the customer is always right, a sentiment few educators hold.

Client centered, student centered, customer centered, and learner centered all mean essentially the same thing—institutions and their employees attempt to focus on the special needs of the individuals they exist to serve through their policies, programs, and practices. Learner centered is but the most recent manifestation of the impulse to respond to individual needs, and it carries the added value of suggesting via the word "learner" the reason for the relationship between the institution and the client, or student, or customer it serves.

Learning Centered

Schools and colleges are by definition centers of learning, and faculty often bridle with appropriate righteous indignation if anyone suggests they are not learning centered. In the last forty years the impulse to place learning more firmly at the center of the educational enterprise has had a number of manifestations. Learning contracts were widely used during the Progressive Education Movement to stipulate for both student and teacher the specific goals and grades the student would achieve. Learning contracts carried the added value of making it clear that it was the student's responsibility to live up to the contract he/she had signed, an old value and practice regaining popularity in the Learning Revolution.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, spurred by the work of Bloom, Postlethwaite, Mager, and others, behavioral objectives became the common currency for learning-centered education. In this period there were major attempts to codify what learning meant by creating banks of specific objectives for courses and programs. Faculty could access these banks of objectives and select those most pertinent to their goals, their teaching styles, and the levels of competency of their students. Some community college leaders were so attracted to the promise of

behavioral objectives they even attempted "management by objectives," and for a while in the 1960s MBO was as popular as TQM has been in more recent years.

The attempt to focus on learning-centered practices emerged again in the 1970s and 1980s under the banner of competency-based education. Community colleges created entrance and exit competencies, especially for selected vocational programs. In some cases students were allowed to enter these programs on demand and exit when they had mastered the required competencies, a practice heralding one of the key goals of the current Learning Revolution. Today, some community colleges, such as the Community College of Denver and Johnson County Community College, have developed exit competencies for every course and program in the catalog.

A flurry of interest in assessment, championed by the American Association for Higher Education, reaching its apogee at Alverno College (WI) in the 1980s and continuing today, has helped focus attention on learning outcomes. Several of the regional accrediting associations have provided leadership in assisting colleges to become more learning centered by requiring more attention to learning outcomes and outcomes assessment. The national effort to establish skill standards and the various state efforts to implement performance-based funding are more recent manifestations of the continuing goal of colleges to become learning centered.

Learning contracts, behavioral objectives, competency-based education, learning outcomes, skill standards, and performance-based funding are all variations on the theme of the notion of learning centeredness. The vision statement of Palomar College (CA) captures the essence of what it means to be learning centered.

> *Our new vision statement reflects a subtle but nonetheless profound shift in how we think of the college and what we do. We have shifted from an identification with process to an identification with results.* ***We are no longer content with merely providing quality instruction. We will judge ourselves henceforth on the quality of student learning we produce.*** *And further, we will judge ourselves by our ability to produce ever greater and more sophisticated student learning and meaningful educational success with each passing year, each exiting student, and each graduating class.*

The Difference

As stated earlier, even though there have been two distinctive streams in education—one learner centered and the other learning centered—many educators still treat the concepts as if they were synonymous. An illustration may clarify the difference.

A client (student, customer, learner) decides to go to an expensive spa for a week to lose five pounds (behavioral objective, learning outcome, exit competency). The client is treated exceedingly well in keeping with the high fees paid. Facials and body wraps are provided daily along with a special diet of spa cuisine. The surroundings are beautifully landscaped; soft music plays in the background; the hectic pace of the outside world is soon forgotten. There are many options to choose from including aerobics, hip-hop classes, guided walks, meditation, and quiet moments of reading. The client is pampered beyond his wildest dreams. The spa is truly client centered, student centered, customer centered, learner centered.

At the end of the week the client packs to leave the spa and, as a final act of self-assessment, steps on the scale in his well-appointed bathroom. To his dismay not one pound has been lost. He has paid a high price for a learner-centered experience but did not achieve his learning-centered goal of losing five pounds.

It is not enough to make students feel good about the environment on the campus or the services they receive. It is not enough to impress students with the dazzling performance of great lecturers. It is not enough to provide all the latest in information technology. If we cannot document expanded or improved learning—however defined and however measured—we cannot say with any assurance that learning has occurred. And it is much more likely that we will be able to document learning when we place high value on learning-centered policies, programs, and practices and when we employ personnel who know how to create learning outcomes, learning options, and learning-centered activities.

Fortunately, we do not have to choose between learner-centered and learning-centered perspectives. In a Learning College it is important for faculty and staff to be both. The Learning College integrates these concepts and requires both care and service for the individual and attention to quality learning outcomes.

Terry O'Banion is the President and CEO of the League for Innovation in the Community College. More information on this topic is available in his most recent book, A Learning College for the 21st Century, available through the Community College Press. This abstract is a revised version of an article published in Community College Week, June 29, 1998.

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LEARNING abstracts

SOARING MOLES AND BURROWING EAGLES: DECISION-MAKING IN THE LEARNING COLLEGE

Jerry Moskus

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?
Or wilt thou go and ask the Mole?
-William Blake, "Thel's Motto"

With its slow information flow, hierarchical structure, and top-down decision-making, the bureaucratic model of organization is part of what Terry O'Banion calls the "old architecture" of education. Today's fast-paced world demands agile, responsive "learning colleges" with redesigned decision-making processes.

A first step in the redesign of decision-making is to discard employee labels like frontline, top-level, and mid-management, which suggest a pecking order of power. Taking a naturalist's view, we might instead term employees *eagles* if they have a broad perspective of the whole college, and *moles* if they have a more focused, intimate view of a portion of the organization.

An unfortunate downside to these new terms is the connotations they carry. Soaring eagles have a more favorable image than burrowing moles. But ecology teaches us that each living thing has unique value, and none has inherent superiority. Thus, the presence of both moles and eagles is essential to the health of an institutional ecosystem, and neither brings greater value to the decision-making process than the other. Moles know many essential details about college operations that eagles do not know, and eagles see patterns and relationships within the college that are hidden to moles.

Whether employees are eagles or moles is often a function of the organizational vantagepoint that comes with their jobs. It is easier for a vice president to be an eagle and a technician to be a mole. Still, good decision-making demands that eagles and moles overcome the limitations their positions impose. Moles do not have ready access to the big picture that eagles often possess, and eagles often have only a surface understanding of parts of the college that moles know thoroughly. Neither eagles nor moles have perfect knowledge, and neither alone can understand all the implications of a particular decision.

Given these restrictions, how can we ensure that we make the best possible decisions? The answer is *learning*, for two key reasons. First, if both eagles and moles embrace learning as a primary value, they will be able to work together more effectively in making decisions. Second, to be successful decisionmakers in today's fast-changing society, eagles and moles must learn as much as possible about the college and its community, learn to share with each other what they have learned, and learn decision-making skills and techniques.

The Power of Learning to Unite

Terry O'Banion and others have demonstrated the power of learning to transform community colleges into more flexible, responsive, and viable organizations. What has been less frequently noted is the power of learning to unite us. "Placing learning at the center of everything we do" is one of the few means we have of uniting a complex institution made up of eagles and moles with different interests and pluralistic values.

A common source of difficulty in decision-making is the ongoing conflict between eagles and moles over who will make which decisions. As we abandon the top-down, orderly bureaucratic model, we encounter confusion over who is best equipped to make a particular decision.

Consider the example of planning a new art instruction facility. Business officers are likely to be concerned with staying within budget. Art faculty will want to ensure adequate space. Efforts to reconcile these interests are likely to become entangled with concerns of other groups. Student services staff will want student lounges, study spaces, and accessibility for special-needs students. Library staff may resist the plan to set aside a room for a specialized art library. The student government will insist that students be involved in the planning. And so on.

People's values add further complexity to the decision-making process. A conservative president may want the new building to blend in with existing architecture, while art faculty may find a more daring design aesthetically pleasing. If the building site requires removing trees, environmental advocates may oppose it. Varying groups may insist that construction materials be environmentally friendly, indigenous, or inexpensive. Others may believe money for the art building would be better spent on a childcare center. If those charged with the final decision take into account all interests and values, the college may never settle on a design. On the other hand, if a value or interest is overlooked, the college may face, at best, a lack of commitment to the plan or, at worst, outright opposition.

Decisionmakers would be well advised to focus on perhaps the one value that everyone on campus can understand and support–*learning*. Thus, the decision process would begin with the question: What kind of building will best support learning about art? Making learning our cardinal value expedites selecting criteria for decisions and reaching consensus. In our complex and rapidly changing colleges, a shared concern for learning has the power to transcend all factions and values. Our shared love of learning can at once unite us and move us forward.

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A Learning College for Decision-Making

A shared commitment to learning will get us on the right track, but it will not get us to our destination without the *act* of learning. At least five organizational qualities are needed to provide a learning environment to support decision-making.

An environment rich in information. A learning college must find ways to overcome the limits our job roles place on our access to knowledge of the organization. A number of steps can be taken to promote an information-rich environment offering frequent and systematic opportunities for moles and eagles to learn from each other: (a) adopt a more "flattened" management structure, (b) routinely open departmental meetings to college executives and invite departmental employees with special expertise to executive team meetings, (c) design a formal strategic planning process with widespread involvement and frequent reviews to help everyone access the big picture, (d) establish a collegewide governance structure that enables eagles and moles to consult with one another, (e) reconceptualize the employee newsletter as a tool for facilitating learning within the organization, and (f) bring in consultants to share special knowledge and skills.

Access to appropriate technology. Computer technology has exploded the amount of information available for learning. With the speed of electricity, computers can move information between all parts of the college. Access to the Internet opens up a wealth of information from outside. Unfortunately, our ability to access information about distant places often outstrips our ability to access information about our own colleges. In many community colleges, we can learn the average January temperature in Lithuania more easily than we can learn the average grade point of our students. To get critical college data, often we must request a special report from the research department and wait until it can be assembled. We have yet to tap the power of technology to provide the instantaneous information needed for optimal decision-making. To become fully learning-centered institutions, we must strive to provide all eagle and mole decisionmakers with a wealth of real-time college data in an easily accessible structure.

A willingness to experiment. Organizational learning often occurs through action, particularly innovation and experimentation. A college that empowers employees to try new things and welcomes both successes and failures as examples of learning will create a better climate for decision-making, but only if the learning that is produced is shared. Too often innovations are walled off from the rest of the college so that the learning they produce is not communicated beyond the individual or team that was directly involved. To extend learning beyond the innovation team, reports of the results and lessons learned from innovations should be routinely distributed and celebrated throughout the campus. The experiences of others in attempting to establish new practices or structures, and the insights they offer about the college, are powerful sources of information for addressing organizational problems.

Numerous connections to the world outside the college. In colleges of the past, searching the external environment for strategic information was the responsibility of executives. Frontline employees were expected to provide services to the community and leave strategic issues to managers, but shortcomings of this model are evident. Eagles may have a broader view of the college, but may not be informed about important segments of the community. Moles may have a better perspective on certain community issues, but may lack insights into how an issue affects the college as a whole. In the learning college, both eagles and moles study the community for strategic information and share that information with one another. Any employee can explore city council issues, local workforce needs, changes in technology, and other community matters important to the college. Eagles and moles both assume responsibility for learning and sharing information about external forces driving organizational change.

Training in decision-making and group dynamics. Community colleges focused on learning must enable their employees to develop the skills necessary to use information successfully in making decisions. Well-designed staff development programs help employees develop skills in establishing learning-based criteria, structuring meetings, communicating effectively, resolving conflicts, selecting and using information, and using effective decision-making processes. To become a learning college, all employees–eagles as well as moles–must be able to access training that can assist them to obtain these essential skills.

Learning to Make Decisions

Placing learning at the center of everything we do facilitates decision-making by establishing a single core value that everyone in the institution can support, ensuring that decisions are made with attention to multiple contexts and perspectives, and developing employees' skills so that decisions are made more rapidly and efficiently. Optimal decision-making, however, calls for one final ingredient. If each major decision concludes with a determination of its outcome, we will learn the most about what works and does not work in the institution. Only then will our present decisions lead to learning that will improve our future decisions.

Almost anyone who has worked in a community college can cite an instance when an eagle made a harmful decision because she did not consult with moles who knew what was "really going on" or of a mole who created havoc for another department when he did not consider the broader implications of a decision. A successful redesign of our decision-making processes requires moles that value soaring and eagles that value burrowing, soaring moles and burrowing eagles, equally focused on a shared mission of learning.

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Learning abstracts

WHAT THE LEARNING PARADIGM MEANS FOR FACULTY

George R. Boggs

The new focus on student learning in higher education promises positive change. First introduced in the early 1990s, the ideas behind this "learning paradigm" or "learning revolution," as some have called it, do not seem to be a passing fad. Articles, books, and even national conferences are bringing more clarity to the tenets of the learning paradigm and how it is being implemented. Yet in these discussions I frequently hear voices of hostility from members of the teaching faculty.

Faculty members are often offended by the language of the learning paradigm. They see a false dichotomy in expressions that seem to pit teaching against learning. They constantly strive to improve their teaching, and they schedule extra review sessions and individual appointments to help their students learn. They get their greatest reward when their students learn and when their former students are successful. They change approaches when the students have problems grasping the material. They cannot understand what is really new in this national attention to student learning. Certainly, they do not see something as significant as a paradigm shift.

Some faculty members are concerned about the loss of teacher control advocated by proponents of the learning paradigm. In the traditional "instruction paradigm," teachers are subject-matter experts who dispense and explain information to students, primarily via lectures. In the learning paradigm, students are more in control of their own learning, often learning from peers in small groups. Information is more widely available.

Other faculty members equate a focus on learning with becoming so student centered that academic standards drop. They believe there is a danger of becoming overly concerned about maintaining student self-esteem to the detriment of preparing students for a "real world" that is complex and not always fair.

An Institutional Perspective

Faculty members who question the ideas of the learning paradigm do not understand that its primary focus is at the institutional level rather than at the individual faculty member level. In fact, their attention to effective teaching in an environment that is sometimes hostile to their new ideas was one of the major factors that led to the proposition that a paradigm shift was needed. It is not an accident that the ideas of the learning paradigm are getting the most attention at institutions that have teaching and learning as primary missions.

There are four important tenets of the learning paradigm. First, the mission of colleges and universities should be student learning rather than teaching or instruction. Second, institutions should accept responsibility for student learning. Third, supporting and promoting student learning should be everyone's job and should guide institutional decisions. Fourth, institutions should judge their effectiveness and be evaluated on student learning outcomes rather than on resources or processes.

Most commonly, the mission statements of colleges and universities set forth the purposes of research, service, and teaching. Rarely, if ever, do mission statements refer to student learning. A 1993 study by Robert Barr, director of institutional research and planning at Palomar College, found no focus on learning in 107 California community colleges' mission statements. In a few instances when the word "learning" was used, it was almost always bundled in the phrase "teaching and learning."

Traditionally, in higher education the student is responsible for learning. The institution is responsible merely for establishing curricular standards and for providing instruction, support services, and resources. But calls for accountability from parents, public officials, and accrediting bodies have changed this notion. With the recent attention to increased educational costs and poor results have come the demand that institutions become accountable for student learning outcomes in exchange for financial support. In a 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey, the Educational Testing Service reported that only about one half of four-year college graduates were able to demonstrate intermediate levels of competency in interpreting prose such as newspaper articles, working with documents such as bus schedules, and using elementary arithmetic to solve problems involving costs of meals in restaurants.

Kay McClenney, vice president of the Education Commission of the States, in an August 1998 issue of *Leadership Abstracts*, said that the inescapable reality is that policymakers and the public are through signing blank checks for higher education. Institutions are expected to perform, to document performance, and to be accountable for producing return on taxpayer and student investment. McClenney predicts that this dynamic is going to be reflected in performance pay. In fact, several states either have instituted some of these measures or are studying them. Proponents of the learning paradigm argue that institutional responsibility for student learning, rather than just providing instruction and service, has the potential to respond to these new demands with significant positive change.

Under the learning paradigm, everyone in an institution is responsible for student learning—teachers, librarians, counselors, secretaries, custodians, food service workers, presidents, trustees. Limiting employees' jobs to traditional roles does not allow employees to identify with the institution's mission and may keep them from noticing institutional problems and barriers outside of their area or from helping students. The shared responsibility for student learning does not relieve the student responsibility, but it means that everyone has a stake in student success.

Planning and operational decisions must be made with consideration to their potential impact on student learning. Robert Barr and John Tagg, in their article "From Teaching to Learning" (*Change*, Nov./Dec. 1995), argue that institutions should restructure to produce better student learning. The instruction paradigm, they say, confuses a means (instruction) with an end (learning). McClenney put it directly when she said that every choice, every decision—about staffing, resource allocation, everything—gets subjected to a simple screen: How does this improve learning?

Popular magazine ratings of colleges and universities are the subject of a great deal of controversy. These annual ratings evaluate institutions primarily on the basis of resources and processes rather than outcomes. Institutions with the most exclusive student admissions standards, the largest library collections, and the largest endowments are usually ranked at the top. Under the learning paradigm, colleges and universities would be judged on the basis of student learning outcomes. Continuous improvement of these outcomes would be a goal.

Implications for Teachers

McClenney predicts profound changes in the roles of faculty and their relationships to students and to one another. She sees traditional instructional methods as ineffective, unaffordable, and infeasible for meeting future demands. Traditionally, college teachers have assumed that students learn through lectures, assigned readings, problem sets, laboratory work, and fieldwork. However, these assumptions are being challenged by new research about how people learn. Evidence from a number of disciplines suggests that oral presentations to large groups of passive students contribute very little to real learning. Faculty members who promote interaction among students in and out of class are rewarded with improved student persistence and success.

In *A Learning College for the 21st Century* (1997, Oryx Press), Terry O'Banion reports that nursing programs in community colleges have some of the highest success rates in all of education, at least in part because a cohort is guided through a rigorous competency-based curriculum. Nursing students study together and support one another, and there is no disincentive for all to succeed at high levels because students are graded not relative to one another (as on a curve) but relative to a given performance standard. Learning communities, in which a group of students take a common set of courses, usually designed around a theme, have also proved their effectiveness in developing a collaborative and cooperative learning environment, which promotes student achievement.

Technology is being used in many new and exciting ways to enhance student learning. Multimedia presentations engage students with different learning styles. Electronic mail provides an avenue for more frequent and more timely interaction between teachers and students. Online chat rooms and discussion groups encourage student interaction. Advances in technology have made information much more available. Teachers will no longer have to function as storehouses of knowledge, keeping up with an explosion of information. Instead, teachers can help students use resources to evaluate information wisely.

Teaching must be viewed as a scholarly activity with its own body of research. Faculty members in the learning paradigm will be concerned not only about keeping up with their disciplines but also about keeping up with what is being discovered about learning and effective methods to promote it. They will be encouraged to experiment with teaching, to study it, and to evaluate it in much the same way they would evaluate other scholarly activity.

Implementing the new learning paradigm does not lessen the status of the teacher or of any other professional. Instead, it focuses the resources of the institution on the outcome of student learning. Shifting control of learning to students should not be seen as a threat. Teachers will be responsible for more important activities than just dispensing information. They will be the designers of the learning environment, constantly assessing and seeking improvements. They will continue to guide, mentor, and evaluate the learning of their students.

The Student as Customer

Many faculty members disagree with the new paradigm's "student as customer" analogy. This analogy is more appropriate when reviewed from an institutional perspective. Competition for students is high. Many colleges and universities have developed extensive enrollment-management and marketing programs to attract students and thus to survive. Tuition costs and the availability of sufficient financial aid have received greater attention. Colleges and universities have expanded student services to retain students and have developed nontraditional schedules to be more convenient. The development of online courses is supported as a way to compete with institutions that offer most of their instruction electronically.

Institutions, particularly community colleges, are attracting older students who do not have time to stand in long lines registering for classes or buying textbooks. Bureaucratic processes and excess paperwork are being replaced with more convenient processes, often making good use of technology. At many institutions, students can now apply for admission, register for classes, and even receive grades using the Internet. Counseling and tutoring, along with coursework, are now available electronically for students who find it inconvenient or impossible to come to campus.

While institutions have been working to attract students and to provide more efficient and more convenient services in much the same way that a business establishes a relationship with a customer, the relationship between a teacher and a student is more complex. The teacher is the designer, the instructor, the guide, the advisor, the motivator, the taskmaster, and the evaluator. Students must listen, observe, take notes, read, write, speak, respond in class, study, and take examinations. Students must work to achieve the very outcomes for which they or their families are paying. Yet the best teachers treat students with the respect due a customer and make extra efforts to help them succeed in their classes.

Faculty and Institutional Change

The efforts of faculty members will be essential in the transformation of colleges and universities to become more learning centered. As influential players in the governance of their institutions, they are in position to help revise mission statements so that they clearly define the institution's purpose as student learning. Faculty members can help ensure that planning and operational decisions are made to impact student learning positively. When designing new facilities, for example, faculty members can insist on the flexibility necessary to support new teaching and learning methods, rather than accept architectural designs based on tradition.

Perhaps the most important institutional activity for faculty in the learning paradigm is to take the lead in identifying learning outcomes for students and developing ways to ensure that graduates achieve those outcomes. Just what should students have learned, and how do we know that they have? These discussions can be valuable at the departmental level, but they are essential at the institutional level. Once learning outcomes are identified and measured, the next step is

to set goals for improvement and try new methods to bring these improvements about.

Educators have a tremendous amount of time and energy invested in the current paradigm and may be resistant or blind to the need to change. Faculty members have been trained by example to provide instruction and grade students. Administrators hire and evaluate teachers on the basis of how well they present materials. College and university policies often make it difficult for faculty to try new methods. Staff members have probably never been told that their jobs are to create an environment conducive to student learning.

Despite these barriers, educators must make student learning a priority. They must establish expectations for learning outcomes, assess whether the expectations have been met, and set goals for improvement. Policies must be changed to encourage new methods. The limitation of traditional methods of instruction will not be accepted much longer, and educators rather than legislators should establish learning outcomes standards. This is a challenge that educators must accept.

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Conversations On Learning

The League for Innovation is pleased to announce a collection of publications designed to stimulate conversations on learning on campuses of community colleges and technical institutes around the world. In a 1998 League survey of more than 600 presidents of the League's Alliance for Community College Innovation, 73 percent of respondents indicated their institutions were engaged in initiatives to become more learning centered. The following publications provide the most up-to-date information available on the Learning Revolution and the Learning College movement.

- *Launching a Learning-Centered College*, by Terry O'Banion
- *Learning Is About Making Connections, The Cross Papers, Number 3*, by League Senior Fellow K. Patricia Cross
- *Opening Windows on Learning, The Cross Papers, Number 2*, by League Senior Fellow K. Patricia Cross
- *Creating More Learning-Centered Community Colleges*, by Terry O'Banion
- *Technology, Learning, and Community: Perspectives from Teaching Excellence Award Recipients*, by Mark D. Milliron and Cindy L. Miles
- *Developmental Education: A Twenty-First Century Social and Economic Imperative*, by League Senior Fellow Robert H. McCabe

For more information on these publications
visit the League's Online Bookstore
at www.league.org
or contact
the Publications Department at
(949) 367-2884

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LEARNING abstracts

Putting Learning First at Sinclair Community College

Karen Wells

In *A Learning College for the 21st Century* (1997), O'Banion suggests that a learning college is a place that has overhauled the traditional architecture of education and placed learning as the primary mission and outcome of education. He goes on to say that "the measure of whether or not community colleges have been successful in becoming more learning-centered can be gauged by embedding two questions in the culture of the institution: *Does this action improve and expand learning?* and *How do we know this action improves and expands learning?* In his book, O'Banion identifies Sinclair Community College as an institution that is putting learning first. This abstract outlines some of the Sinclair initiatives that led O'Banion to his conclusion and highlights progress the college has made on its journey since the book was published.

The Sinclair Quality Initiative

Sinclair made significant movement toward becoming a learning college when it began to explore total quality management and started a quality initiative. As part of this process, college constituents developed a vision and mission statement focused on learning. One product of the quality initiative at Sinclair is the Institutional Effectiveness Model, which identifies six core indicators of effectiveness including access, student development, lifelong learning, quality workplace, community focus, and stewardship. Key performance indicators are used to measure progress on each of the core indicators. Faced with the challenges of institutionalizing the whole idea of quality, of using quality tools to measure effectiveness, and of incorporating the six indicators of effectiveness into daily work, Sinclair adopted the practice of mission modeling.

The Mission Model and the Language of the Learning College

Mission modeling is a technique for achieving focus within college departments by engaging employees in discussions of how to translate the overall college mission to their roles and responsibilities. Sinclair placed learning in the center of the model to align all college employees with the learning college movement. Using this model, all of the work groups in the college identified activities they are involved in that foster learning. Everyone at Sinclair began to talk about learning and what they do to contribute to it, and each unit developed its own mission model. One key indicator of the success of mission modeling is that everyone began to speak another "language"—to talk about learning and what activities contribute to learning. This year, the allocation of college resources was determined in large part on the basis of learning-based initiatives found in each department's mission model.

Faculty and Staff Evaluations

While the mission models were being developed, a group called the *Learning Excellence Task Force* revised the processes, policies, and procedures related to faculty compensation. The task force began its work with revisions of job descriptions for each academic rank and the Faculty Performance Review (FPR) process and then moved on to identify new criteria for promotion, tenure, and merit, all of which reflect the needs of learners. The task force piloted the new FPR in the fall of 1998. What is significant about the new FPR is that it aligns faculty evaluation with the core indicators of effectiveness and includes continuous improvement targets (CITs) that are consistent with department and division mission models.

Simultaneously, a *Focus on Excellence* process was developed to align the work of all other employees at the college with the Institutional Effectiveness Model's core indicators of effectiveness. Not only is every employee now evaluated against progress toward the core, but every employee identifies CITs. Beginning next year, salary considerations will be based partially upon continuous progress toward specific targets, and institutional merit will be a component of every employee's compensation package. Sinclair has established target performance levels in various categories at institutional, divisional, and departmental levels. A portion of all employees' pay will depend on their collective performance.

Curriculum Development

At the same time Sinclair was overhauling the traditional architecture of education through its quality initiative, mission modeling, and evaluation revisions, it was also engaged in a significant curriculum overhaul. With funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Center of Excellence for Advanced Manufacturing Education (NCE/AME) was established with an emphasis on curriculum development, faculty enhancement, and national dissemination.

The curriculum architecture developed through the NCE/AME initiative became significant in terms of Sinclair's transformation into a learning college. To date, a modular, project-based curriculum has been developed. This curriculum is competency based, workplace relevant, activity and teamwork based, and ensures that each learning activity is anchored to real-world applications. The curriculum architecture supports a constructivist perspective in which learning occurs within both a social and

cultural context. Students must construct their own knowledge base by synthesizing new experiences within the framework of previous experiences. As students become actively engaged in the learning process, they develop the ability to translate prior experiences and cross-discipline learning to new educational and life experiences. All of the components of the curriculum architecture align Sinclair's curriculum with the workplace and with the knowledge age.

The modularization of the curriculum was the basis for on-going discussion about creating and offering as many options for learners as possible. Furthermore, a commitment to alpha and beta testing of the modules taught us a great deal about documenting improved and expanded learning.

Once the curriculum architecture was in place for manufacturing, Sinclair applied for and received an institutionwide reform grant from NSF which provided seed money to disseminate the curriculum architecture across the curriculum and to overcome barriers to change, e.g., faculty workload, business operations, student experiences, state subsidy, and transfer. With this reform initiative we began seeking answers to a series of broader questions, such as *How will a registrar at a university interpret a curriculum module? How will the North Central Association interpret a curriculum module in terms of the standards for accreditation?* and *How do we translate curriculum modules into full-time equivalent students in order to receive state funding?*

Overcoming Barriers to the Learning College

The institutionwide reform initiative included a skunk-works team whose charge was to determine a means to overcome present and future barriers to change. We call this team the Pathfinders, and their solution is *The Parallel College Process for Initiating, Integrating, and Operationalizing Innovation*. The process enables innovation, tests innovation, and fosters intense communication. It supports confronting barriers, testing alternatives, focusing on lessons learned, and scaling-up solutions. If an innovation is aligned with the college core indicators of effectiveness and meets other learning college criteria, it moves into parallel college status where there are special privileges and requisite accountabilities. The parallel college is a test environment where test results are documented and efficiencies are identified. Successful innovations are implemented based upon test results.

Specifically, the Pathfinders have successfully applied the parallel college process to a faculty professional development opportunity called *Strategic Learning Challenge Awards*, which provide financial support to those who want to innovate. The Learning Challenge Awards process links a strategic theme to college strategy, focuses on the end results through common proposal criteria, leverages learning, aligns existing measurement tools, utilizes expert resources, and includes a detailed project plan with specific measures and perceived barriers. Pathfinders are assigned to Learning Challenge Award teams to assist them in overcoming barriers throughout their projects. The strategic theme for 1999-2000 is student retention.

Another significant outcome of the work of the Pathfinders, who were initially more narrowly charged with facilitating curriculum innovation, is that Sinclair now has a more strategic approach to professional development. Because Sinclair commits over four percent of its operating budget to professional development activities, becoming more strategic is a priority.

Restructuring for the Learning College

The work of the Pathfinders caused us to think differently about organizational structure at Sinclair and how we should organize to become a learning college. In the learning college, people come together to work toward a common goal, often working outside of their traditional work group. Based upon this principle, Sinclair president Ned Sifferlen organized Distance Learning, Corporate and Community Services, the Advanced Integrated Manufacturing Center, and the Center for Interactive Learning into one team, the Integrated Learning Services (ILS) Team.

Both internally and externally, the college faces demands for accountability, for efficiency and productivity, and for doing more with less. Educational institutions traditionally find it difficult to respond to these kinds of demands because we are not in the habit of thinking about return on investment. The ILS Team thought carefully about return on investment throughout the past year. These four once-separate units were brought together to look very carefully at how they could share both human and financial resources. They have identified from among their personnel an operations team, a financial team, a student access and retention team, a marketing and sales team, an administrative coordination team, a Web-advisory team, and a partnership team.

The participants on these teams are working in cross-functional ways to look at how Distance Learning, Advanced Integrated Manufacturing, Corporate and Community Services, and the Center for Interactive Learning can all contribute to a common budget. The ILS Team has a business plan and a financial bottom line. What is beginning to happen is that the lessons learned from the work of the ILS Team are being applied to the traditional side of the college. Just as we are engaging students in the learning process as full partners who are responsible for their own choices, we are engaging each college employee in the same way.

Restructuring for return on investment is important to the success of a learning college because it translates into the lowest possible tuition and fees and the greatest opportunity for access and for offering as many options to learners as possible. Sinclair students benefit by paying the lowest tuition in Ohio.

The Strategic Plan

Most recently, the college has developed a strategic plan which identifies three critical areas of institutional performance and fourteen related strategic initiatives. Clearly, the strategic plan is a product of the lessons learned while working on all of the initiatives described in this abstract, among others. At Sinclair we believe that to become a learning college, our mission, curriculum, professional development, compensation system, institutional effectiveness process, and organizational structure must be aligned with learning college principles. We feel we can demonstrate significant progress toward becoming a learning college as well as toward our commitment to create substantive change in individual learners, including ourselves.

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LEARNING abstracts

LAUNCHING *LEARNINGFIRST* AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF BALTIMORE COUNTY

Irving Pressley McPhail

When the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) began its journey toward becoming a learning-centered institution last year, the college started with a new strategic plan, *Learning**First***, designed to create a learning community dedicated to student success. This initiative also addressed lingering challenges faced by this recently consolidated single college, multicampus institution.

Three Into One

In 1995, legislation was introduced to combine the Catonsville, Dundalk, and Essex colleges into a multicollege system. Administered from a single office led by a chancellor, the system was to achieve savings by combining and downsizing the institutional support functions of the three colleges. The matrix management model employed to govern the new system gave systemwide responsibilities to college presidents and many college employees.

Clashes over the savings to be achieved, the disposition of funds, and other economic issues led to a breakdown in the relationship among the board of trustees, the county government, and the chancellor. College employees, especially the faculty, became increasingly disenchanted with the merger. These conditions and the environment of distrust that had developed over the years culminated in an unprecedented, draconian $2.3 million reduction in county appropriations for the college in FY 1997 and, six months later, the termination of the first chancellor. An interim chancellor was appointed, the board was restructured, and a new board chair was appointed. Finally, new legislation completed the merger of the three colleges into a single college, three-campus system.

On Vision and Leadership

The challenge faced by a new leader in a time of turmoil is to provide vision and direction for the institution. A leader cannot command or control the community and conditions surrounding the college, and the formal authority a leader has is quite limited. To be effective, a leader must articulate a vision that employees view as worthwhile. Because informal authority can be grounded in a vision that addresses the needs of those with whom a leader interacts internally and externally, a leader must also use the vision when dealing with the external environment.

To address the challenges he and the college faced, CCBC's new chancellor sought the creation of a student-centered learning environment. He reviewed planning documents and task force materials, interviewed personnel throughout the system, and conducted an environmental scan to update core trends. Using the learning college principles defined by O'Banion (1997) and Barr and Tagg (1995) as the foundation, he led the creation of *Learning**First***, a new strategic plan for the college. *Learning**First*** incorporated a series of strategic directions designed to make CCBC a premier learning-centered institution.

LearningFirst

*Learning**First*** contains a core strategic direction, Student Learning, and six supporting directions: Learning Support, Learning College, Infusing Technology, Management Excellence, Embracing Diversity, and Building Community.

Student Learning establishes learning as CCBC's core value and direction. All actions are evaluated and judged based on this proposition. CCBC's goal is to provide a quality, learning-centered education that maximizes learning and makes students partners in their education. Students must be able to frame and achieve their own goals and develop skills for the 21st century.

Learning Support provides for a comprehensive, responsive system that increases student access to learning opportunities and recognizes the student as central to the learning process. *Learning Support* goals are to increase student retention and success, create seamless instructional and student support services, improve student skills assessment and placement, and increase community access to programs and services.

Learning College provides direction for CCBC's transformation into a learning college, promoting innovation, the free exchange of ideas, continuous improvement through organizational learning, and assessment through a comprehensive institutional effectiveness and evaluation system.

Infusing Technology advances the use of technology to enhance student learning and to improve the effectiveness

and efficiency of college operations. The college is committed to serving Baltimore County by maintaining its position as the county's primary provider of technology workforce training.

Management Excellence is designated to facilitate the efficient and effective use of resources by linking planning and budgeting. This strategy promotes low-cost access to the college by ensuring efficient operations and focusing on generating additional resources.

Through *Embracing Diversity*, CCBC focuses on attracting and retaining a diverse faculty, staff, and student community. CCBC accomplishes this through a number of initiatives including advancing a learning environment that embraces and values diversity, incorporating diversity into the curriculum, and recognizing and addressing diverse learning styles.

Finally, *Building Community* defines CCBC as an active member of its larger community. CCBC takes a lead role in workforce training throughout the county and forms partnerships to support economic and community development.

The Integrated Planning Model

A three-tiered planning process at CCBC has been the primary force in maintaining momentum. *Learning**First*** provides a five-year strategic foundation, while the integrated planning model focuses on annual operational plans and quarterly results management. This approach requires individuals throughout the institution to measure and quantify long-range plans in such areas as enrollment management, technology, and continuing education. The integrated planning model's emphasis on yearly action plans, accountability, open communications, and broad-based participation signals to all constituent groups that *Learning**First*** is not a fad or a public relations gimmick but the soul of the institution.

CISL: The Key to Our Success

Central to the learning college movement at CCBC, the Council on Innovation and Student Learning (CISL) is a collegewide, campus-based think tank for *Learning**First***. CISL includes 27 members representing faculty, classified staff, students, administrators, and trustees. CISL functions with four subcommittees: Learning Outcomes, Campus Outreach and Staff Development, Learning Communities, and Learning Paradigm Topics. CISL also connects, coordinates, and collaborates with campus-based CISL groups and leaders responsible for general education, developmental education, and professional development.

CISL's successes include a Guide for Learning Outcomes Assessment and Classroom Learning Assessment, a Virtual Academy to support faculty in designing online courses, and the first annual Dundalk Council on Innovation and Student Learning/*Learning**First*** Fair. This all-day event featured faculty presentations on online courses, assessment tools for career infusion, cultural diversity in the curriculum, CD-Roms in science, and learning communities in developmental education.

FY 2000 Budget

The commitment to *Learning**First*** has led to a major re-conceptualization of the budget process. Two questions now drive budget decision making: (1) Will this project, decision, allocation, activity, or plan enhance student learning? (2) How will we know it has enhanced student learning?

The CCBC budget is organized around the seven strategic directions of *Learning**First***, a factor that has helped restore confidence in the college. The proposed FY 2000 budget was adopted by the board in December 1998 and was then reviewed by the Baltimore County Executive and the Baltimore County Council. The county executive recommended a nearly $1.8 million increase in county appropriations for CCBC over that of the previous year, and following a successful budget hearing before the council, the final FY 2000 approved budget totaled $105.1 million, a 4.4 percent increase over the college's FY 1999 adjusted budget.

The FY2000 budget success is largely due to recognition among Baltimore County officials that CCBC is operating with a vision and planning process focused on results in student learning. The additional funding has enabled CCBC to launch several *Learning**First*** initiatives, including the introduction of a new associate's degree program in Internet/Multimedia, the expansion of distance education via the Internet and telecourses, and an advanced emphasis on global education through student opportunities to study abroad and faculty exchanges and partnerships. This year, CCBC will evalute all facets of college operations through a comprehensive institutional effectiveness system based on the learning college model.

A Look to the Future

*Learning**First*** promotes the idea of a learning community that engages all members of the college, providing them with a similar shared vision. Nevertheless, organizational goals will not be realized unless the institutional community integrates them into actions. The learning college, as promoted by the chancellor and members of the college community, provides individuals a clear, logical focus and a set of decision rules to use. Individuals can engage in a process that forces them to judge all their actions by the principles of the learning college. CBCC personnel are confident that the college has started the journey toward becoming a premier, learning-centered institution.

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LEARNING abstracts

PROMISING PROSPECTS: AN INNER LONDON APPROACH TO 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

Wendy Forrest

When Learning Abstracts *was introduced last year, we at the League for Innovation sought to foster "continuing conversations on the Learning Revolution." Thus far, the discussion has been limited to voices from the United States; however, with this issue we welcome the first international author in the* Learning Abstracts *series. Wendy Forrest presents one U.K. Further Education College's response to the challenges it faces on its journey toward becoming more learning centered. Forrest's contribution also gives us an opportunity to encourage voices from around the globe to join these conversations on learning.*

In the United Kingdom, every labour market report, economic profile, and employer survey insists on the importance of generic skills, those behaviours that underpin effective performance in almost any job. Every employer wants staff who can communicate, work together, solve problems, empathise with customers, and so on. We're told these skills will be even more critical in the 21st century, yet British postsecondary education has been slow to grasp this nettle. At Lewisham College (U.K.), however, our strategic plan, Promising Prospects, features methods for assisting our students in attaining these important skills. As we become increasingly learning centered, our focus is on providing our students with the full range of skills necessary for success in the 21st century workplace. The process is not without its challenges, though, and we continue to seek ways to overcome the obstacles we encounter on our journey. This abstract outlines the state of skills training in the U.K., briefly defines the challenges involved in integrating skills training into British postsecondary education, and shares the efforts of one Further Education College in meeting these challenges.

The Key Skills Challenge

Unequal Status of Key Skills. Recent policy shifts in British postsecondary education have put the emphasis on six key skills: *Communication, Application of Number, Information Technology, Improving Own Learning Performance, Working with Others,* and *Problem Solving.* These are specified and accredited at five levels, where level two equates to the average attainment at age 16 and level five is postgraduate. Interestingly, the status of these six areas is by no means equal. *Communication, Application of Number,* and *Information Technology* are the closest to standard school subjects; indeed, these three are required for some national qualifications and are assessed outside the individual college. However, *Improving Own Learning Performance* and *Working with Others* are sometimes called "optional" despite the importance of initiative and teamwork skills to employers. *Problem Solving* is the last to be piloted even though a leading national voice in vocational education, Gilbert Jessup, described it as a "superordinate" skill almost a decade ago.

Traditional Attitudes. So what goes wrong? Attempts to modernise learning with a view to a changing working world seem to be caught in a system which automatically defaults to the traditional school curriculum. There are a number of reasons for this. The academic and vocational divide is still very strong in British education and "parity of esteem" does not yet exist. To many, education should be untainted by the needs of industry and commerce. Late last year, *The Observer*, a leading liberal newspaper, poured scorn on the attempt to develop the employability of our university students. Additionally, policy makers and opinion formers are the beneficiaries of traditional academic processes and are slow to recognise the millions of learners who leave the system believing themselves to have failed.

Skills Training vs. Employability. Along with social and political perceptions surrounding British education, another problem concerns the existing postsecondary qualification framework. British Further Education (FE) colleges have no signature qualification which equates to the North American associate degree, and attempts to pull together the thousands of vocational qualifications on offer have been only partially successful. Both learning delivery and student motivation are tied to the achievement of inflexible qualifications and, since funding constraints are also a problem, colleges like Lewisham are forced to dedicate learning time to the achievement of specific vocational qualifications at the expense of key skills.

These qualifications seem to require that our energies be spent training people for a particular skill rather than fully preparing them for employment. Job-specific competence and industry-related knowledge will not fill the skills gaps employers perceive in generic areas such as negotiation and problem-solving. An organisation of British employers,

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Industry in Education, claims that employers are neither willing nor competent to train in key skills, but are ready to train for particular jobs those who already have key skills. Our experience may not yet bear this out, but the message embedded in the industry claim is one we need to hear.

Facing the Challenge

North American colleagues may be bemused by our concern with national policy, asking why we don't meet the challenge locally while waiting for national developments to catch up. At Lewisham College, our strategic plan, Promising Prospects, takes on the challenge in setting our 21st century curriculum goals. We want our learners not only to receive as many capabilities as possible to meet national qualification standards, but also to have communication skills, self-assurance, interpersonal acumen, and the agility and creativity necessary for entrepreneurship. To give our graduates an additional edge in the job market and a spur to lifelong learning, we are committed to offering "more than a job qualification." We want our students to possess the key skills that will make them valued employees.

As we shape our 21st century curriculum, we are asking how, with limited hours and funds, we can concentrate on improving current achievement rates while ensuring that our graduates have important work, interpersonal, and lifelong learning skills. We seek a scope for adding to content by changing learning delivery methods. We must shift the curriculum balance towards the national definition of key skills, particularly at foundation and entry levels, but we're also exploring learning processes which support our desired outcomes. We have focused our efforts toward shaping a 21st century curriculum in four key areas:

(1) Problem-Based Learning (PBL). In PBL, groups of students identify realistic problems, decide what they need to learn, share responsibility for learning, and evaluate solutions. PBL helps us give students a toolkit for working together, finding information, approaching problems, and reviewing performance, all while strengthening initiative, team skills, and decision making that are critical for employability. One of the strongest claims made for PBL is that it delivers people who are not only qualified but also work ready. The best vocational education has always drawn on real-life tasks and a problem-solving approach. At Lewisham, for example, performing and creative arts students are involved in PBL when they tackle problems posed by real performance or design tasks.

(2) Emotional Intelligence. We also want our students to be self-assured, to have the "I can handle it" approach we associate with their North American peers. Employers have long been concerned about attitude amongst their younger, less skilled recruits, but we now know that emotional intelligence, as described by Daniel Goleman and others, contributes to workplace success for all employees. At Lewisham College, we are highly skilled at supporting disaffected young people–we've published a national guidance manual, *Students Who Challenge the System*–but these skills are not spread throughout the college. We all need to be self-aware, empathetic, motivated, and resilient if we're to be effective learners and workers who can both draw on and contribute to group resources. Because emotional intelligence is essential to student learning, we have opened a special resource collection on this topic for students and staff in our Learning Centre. We also offer staff the chance to improve their motivational, interpersonal, and parenting skills with a view to passing their new understandings to students. But we know this is just a start in taking on a huge task.

(3) Independent Learning. Since universities and employers will expect our graduates to undertake some learning on their own, we want our students to be independent learners. We think the lack of independent learning skills threatens students with a future amongst the information poor, so we want to give them the benefit of interactive resources which respond to their needs, progress, and learning styles. To do this, we need to look at new models of delivery. We plan to integrate independent learning, or supported self-study, into all our full-time courses. This year we have 34 courses in which Learning Centre staff work with course specialists to offer a particular chunk of the curriculum in this way.

(4) Credit and Transfer. The British qualification maze and the English system of funding postschool learning offer no help with credit accumulation and transfer, but our students need to be able to map individual routes through learning. Unitisation, or modularised curriculum, allows learners to build their certificated achievement in manageable chunks which support flexible and individualised delivery. This works for Lewisham students in areas as different as information technology, fashion, and English as an additional language. But a truly flexible offer needs a unitised credit framework which works across institutions. We have taken the unitisation of our curriculum as far as the present system allows, and we know that the barriers to further development must soon give way.

Through Promising Prospects, we have begun to map the ways in which different approaches to learning might mesh. We must be sure the learning process fits the key learning outcomes and that learning through these approaches can better prepare our students for work. We use the analogy of vowels and consonants to think about the way key skills need to thread through vocational skills to make them useful. In this spirit, we say that our task is to develop learners who are assured, empathetic, innovative, owning, and undaunted. The demands of such a 21st century curriculum can seem overwhelming, but we are struggling to meet them. Despite the challenges, we at Lewisham are dedicated to managing the *what* by reshaping the *how*.

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